

IN THE ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE:

Please amend the abstract as follows:

ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

~~The present invention reduces, in~~ In a pattern inspection apparatus for comparing images of corresponding areas of two patterns, which are formed so as to be identical, so as to judge that a non-coincident part of the images is a defect, the influence of unevenness in brightness of patterns caused by a difference of thickness or the like and realizes is reduced, whereby highly sensitive pattern inspection is realized. In addition, ~~the present invention realizes high-speed pattern inspection~~ can be carried out without ~~requiring changing an~~ the image comparison algorithm. ~~In other words, in the present invention,~~ For this purpose, the pattern inspection apparatus ~~for comparing images of corresponding areas of two patterns, which are formed so as to be identical, to judge that a non-coincident part of the images is a defect includes means for performing~~ operates to perform comparison processing of images in parallel in plural areas. Further, the pattern inspection apparatus ~~includes means for converting~~ operates to convert gradation of an image signal among compared images ~~by using~~ different plural processing units such that, even in the case in which a difference of brightness occurs in an identical pattern among images, a defect can be detected correctly.